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CHRISTMAS BUILDERS



CHARLES EDWARD
JEFFERSON

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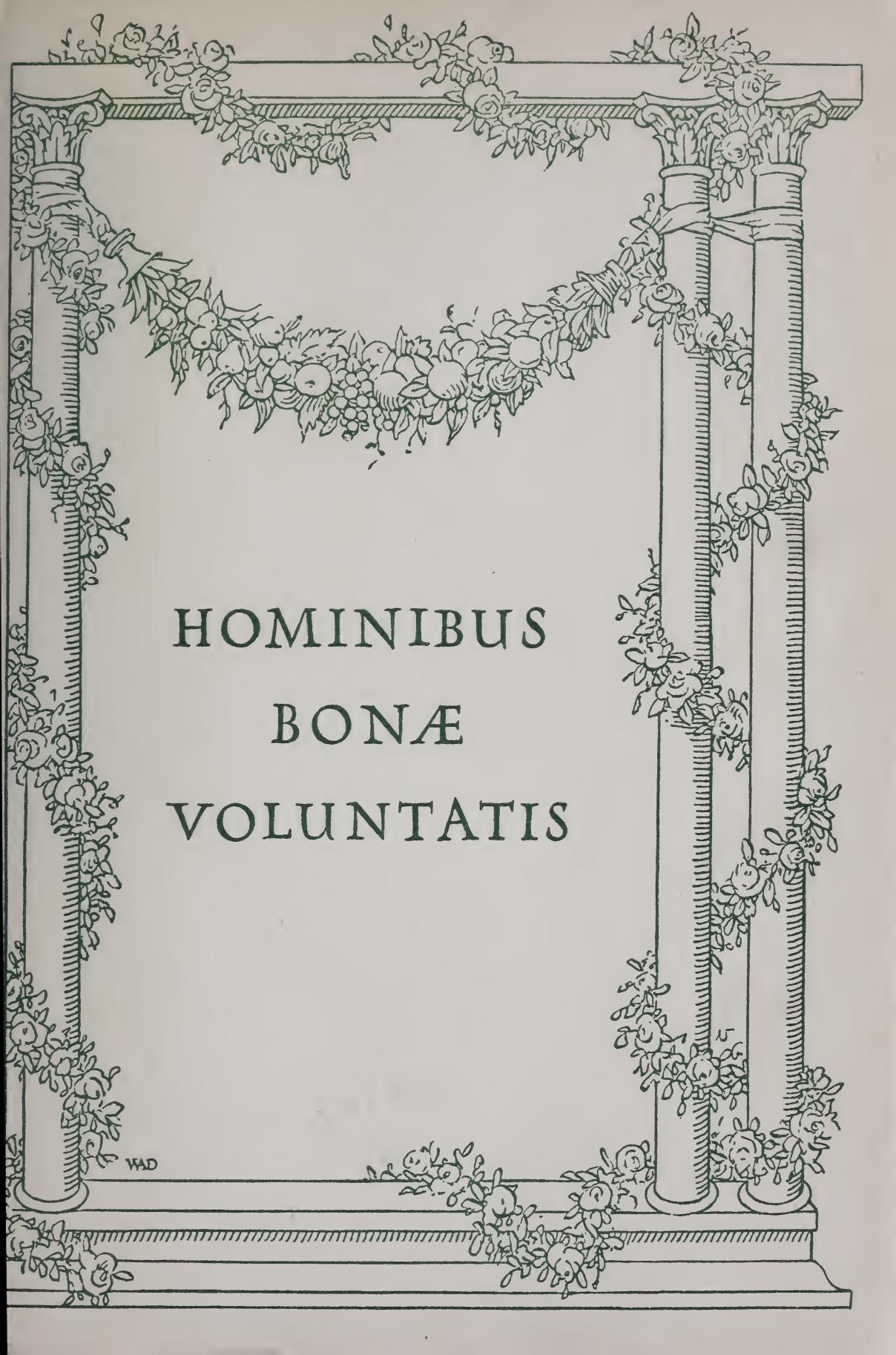


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BOOKS BY DR. JEFFERSON

THE CHARACTER OF JESUS
DOCTRINE AND DEED
THE MINISTER AS PROPHET
THE NEW CRUSADE
QUIET HINTS TO GROWING PREACHERS
QUIET TALKS WITH EARNEST PEOPLE
THINGS FUNDAMENTAL
MY FATHER'S BUSINESS

CHRISTMAS BUILDERS
FAITH AND LIFE
THE OLD YEAR AND THE NEW
THE WORLD'S CHRISTMAS TREE

THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.
NEW YORK



To him undoubtedly has God committed the secret of Christmas

Christmas Builders

BY

CHARLES EDWARD
JEFFERSON



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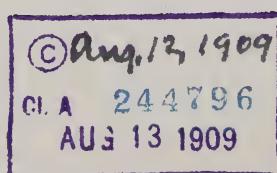
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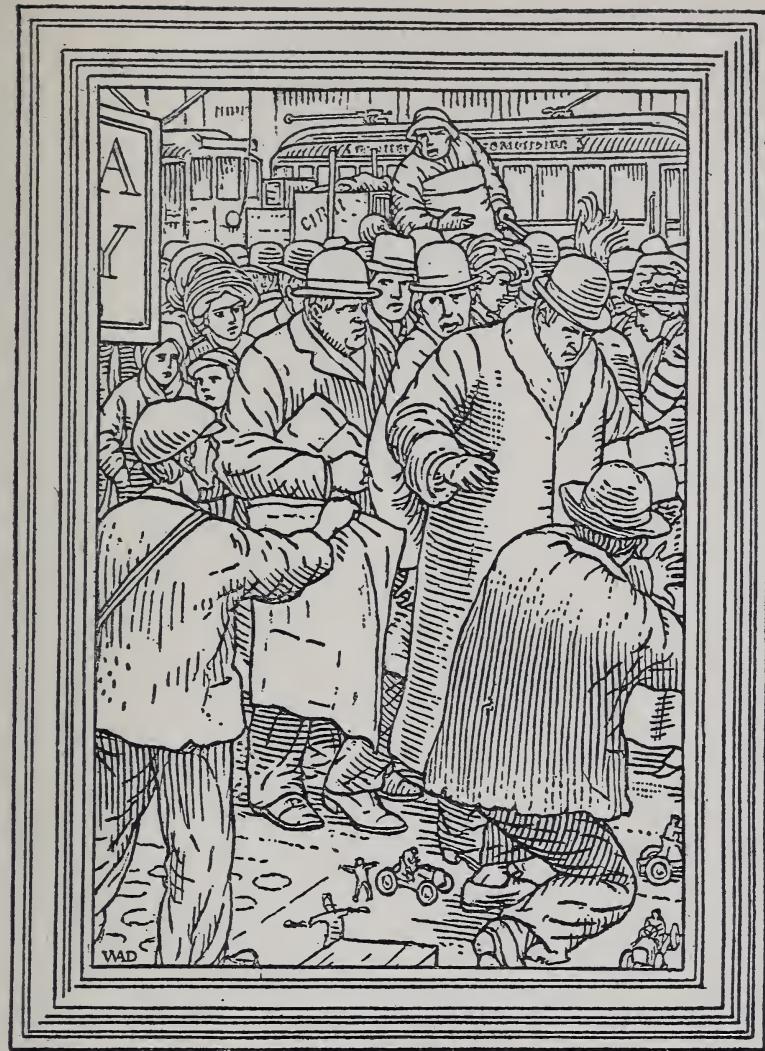
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THERE was trouble in the land, all on account of Christmas. Men stood bewildered and women were distracted, not knowing what to do. The trouble was that Christmas had become too small. Once there was room enough in it and to spare. Only a few of the inhabitants of the earth brought their treasures into it. But little by little the world learned of the beauty of Christmas until everybody, almost, wanted to get into it, and not only into it himself, but he wanted to bring all his relatives and friends, every one of them laden with packages and bundles, until at last Christmas became crowded to suffocation. There was not room to turn round. Everybody was so huddled and jostled, and there was so much

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scrambling and pushing, that some people quite lost their temper, and even in the palace of Christmas looked sour.

It seems strange that the world should be embarrassed and really injured by a desire of people to be loving and to manifest their love by giving gifts, and yet that is the very thing which happened. Christmas became a breeder and disseminator of dark and ugly feelings. It is well enough when only a few people make up their mind to be affectionate and generous; but when everybody decides to put on the Christmas graces on the same day of the year, the world cannot stand the strain of so much goodness all at once expressed, and the result is a tragedy almost as deep and dark for many hearts as if there were no Christmas at all. For in their eagerness to keep



When forgot the claims of brotherhood

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Christmas, men forgot the claims of brotherhood. They were so zealous to get into the enchanted palace themselves that they forgot all about their neighbors, who wanted to get in also.

One cannot very well manufacture gifts himself, and therefore some one else must make them. One cannot carry gifts himself,—at least not all of them,—and therefore some one else must carry them. As Christmas was just a day and as it came only once a year, all the days preceding Christmas became frenzied and feverish, and men and women by the thousands were compelled to work so fast and through such long hours that they were not able to reach the palace at all. They had their faces in the direction of it, but they were all so jaded and out of breath that when the palace

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came in sight they had not energy sufficient to enjoy the beauty of it, and could only look on half dazed and benumbed at the more fortunate mortals who had been able to get inside of its golden doors.

Letter-carriers, knowing by experience what Christmas really was, began to lament long before the month of December came, seeing in their imagination the huge bundles of letters and papers and packages which must be carried up the crowded roadway of the days which led to the Christmas palace. Expressmen also never spoke enthusiastically of Christmas, but scowled at the mere mention of it, as though it were a prison instead of a palace, a sort of punishment which was inexorably inflicted on them at the end of every year. Dressmakers were

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also sickened even by the thought of Christmas, for just before that beautiful day every woman wanted a new coat or a new waist or a new skirt, and everybody wanted it at once, so that she would be ready for Christmas, the result being that the dress-makers and all the girls in their shops were so driven and so roundly scolded by impatient and sharp-tongued customers that it was really difficult on the twenty-fifth of December to feel charitable and forgiving and kind to all. Christmas Day was a palace filled with beautiful sights and sounds, but the fact is that many people never got into it, but sat down fagged and despondent at the door. Clerks in the big stores had no good word for Christmas, notwithstanding its beauty and its hallowed associations. Some of them, I

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fear, hated it, especially the young women clerks, for the hours were so long and the crowds in the store were so big and the air was so bad, and so many of the people were so unreasonable and inconsiderate and crotchety, and the cars at evening were so crowded and the nights seemed so short, that clerks were heard saying to one another, "Won't you be glad when Christmas is over?"

Many children even grew to be afraid of Christmas. They dreaded it as though it were a huge goblin or monster casting a shadow over the days which preceded it. The little delivery boys at the grocery stores became so weary lugging good things for Christmas dinners that they could not laugh real heartily or enjoy their own dinner when Christmas Day came.

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It was so late the night before when the last basket was delivered that the boys fell into a sleep too deep even for dreams. They lost the rare and radiant pleasure which is the birth-right of boys,—the joy of dreaming of what a good time is coming on Christmas. And as for the little girls who worked all day long tying up bundles in the basements of the great stores, they did their best to keep alive in their hearts a genuine love of the birthday of Jesus, but, alas, in many cases their heroic efforts were in vain. “I just hate Christmas!” said one little girl to another at the end of a long and wearisome day.

Things have indeed come to a tragic pass when a thought of the one most splendid and gorgeous day of the entire year quenches the sparkle in a

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child's eyes and crushes every feeling of ecstatic anticipation out of a child's heart. It was indeed a spectacle to cause one to stop and ponder, this widespread shrinking and shuddering at the very thought of Christmas, this long-drawn sigh of relief when Christmas was really over.

And when I looked around and saw how all the days immediately preceding Christmas were thrown into tumult and confusion in which thousands of men and women and boys and girls were wounded, and many of them hurt with an injury that was deep; and when I looked at the days succeeding Christmas and saw them covered with the wreckage which Christmas had created, the holiday season resembling indeed a great battlefield on which a terrific battle had been fought, the maimed and

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bleeding lying moaning, waiting for the healing influences of a new year, I began to ask myself, What is the cause of this great tragedy, and how can humanity be delivered from so great a scourge?

It seemed unendurable that the anniversary of the birthday of Jesus should be permitted to wreck the happiness of so many hearts and homes. If Christmas stands for anything it stands for joy. "Peace and good will"—this is the heart of Christmas. The first Christmas was ushered in by a burst of song, and the last Christmas to be celebrated on our planet will no doubt dawn in the same heavenly way. "Peace on earth, good will toward men," so the angels sang, and keep on singing, and will continue to sing forever. "Do not be afraid," said the vis-

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itor from the skies, "for I bring you good tidings of great joy." Fear was banished when Jesus came, and so were all the dark and dismal spectres of the mind. The shepherds were glad, and so were the aged saints in the temple, and so were the scholars from the East, and so was everybody—except Herod—who came to know of the arrival of the wonderful baby. Human hearts began to sing when Jesus came, and nothing must be allowed to reduce the volume or the sweetness of the music. What is wrong, I asked, with Christmas that it has become a sort of discord in the harmony of the year? Why should the one most lustrous day of all the months loom dark and terrible before so many eyes? Why should pain and sorrow flow like swollen and dismal streams from a day created by

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infinite love for making human hearts rejoice?

On investigation I discovered that Christmas had simply become too small to accommodate the Christmas sentiment of the world. The dimensions of the palace were not sufficiently spacious to allow all of us to get in without treading on one another. One day was not large enough for the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Twenty-four hours were not sufficient to allow everybody to practise the precept of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The Christmas heart had outgrown the narrow limits of the Christmas day, and the problem of the world in the first decade of the twentieth century was, How can Christmas be enlarged?

The query raised a host of interest-

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ing questions wherever it was propounded. Men began to ask, Is it possible to expand the limits of Christmas, to extend the dimensions of its golden rooms, to widen the area on which it stands? For instance, would it be possible to make Christmas cover two days instead of one? How would it do to say that Christmas is the 24th and 25th of December, or the 25th and 26th of December? At first glance one would declare that this is quite impossible, for the reason that Jesus was born on the 25th of December and therefore we have no right to include in our Christmas celebration any other day. But right here we face a curious and puzzling fact. Nobody knows on what particular day of December Jesus of Nazareth was born.

The question has always been a

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matter of dispute, even among those who might presumably be best fitted to know. He may have been born the 24th or the 26th, or even the 27th or 28th. Indeed, for all we know he may have been born on any day of our month of December, so that we have a right to build the palace of Christmas on any day of the month, for every day is equally eligible for consecration, and in order to be sure that we have the right day, why not allow Christmas to cover the entire month? The ancients were so fearful of slighting one of the gods that after they had erected altars to all the gods whose names they knew, they sometimes erected an altar to the unknown god, in this way being sure of not omitting from the scope of their reverence any god who had a right to be included. Why not make

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sure of having the right day in December by building the Christmas palace upon them all? Thirty-one foundation stones instead of one would support a really royal structure, and surely a palace filling the dimensions of a month would be none too large for the commemoration of the most stupendous event in human history—the birth of Jesus.

By thus expanding Christmas we should not get into such a pet and fury as some of us now do. We should have time to think about the meaning of this great event for which Christmas stands, and we should also become more accustomed to the exercise of the Christmas virtues. As things now are we have scarcely time enough to bring the Christmas graces to fullest bloom. One day is quite too short. To enter-

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tain and nourish beautiful and charitable thoughts, to kindle and foster kind and forgiving feelings, to set the heart singing and the spirit adoring, for all this a single day is hardly long enough. If we should think such thoughts every day for a week and a month, our minds would get accustomed to these high altitudes and would not sink back so readily to lower and unworthy levels of mental and emotional conduct. If we should go right on for a month forgiving our enemies and breathing charity for all, we might get so habituated to these heavenly feelings as never again to be willing to give them up. A month is none too large as a foundation on which to build a mansion spacious enough fitly to commemorate the coming of our Lord.

Not only would it be better for our-

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selves if in some such way Christmas might be expanded, but hosts of our brothers and sisters would be gladdened by the change. With an entire month at one's disposal in which to do one's Christmas shopping and to tie up one's Christmas packages and to plan for one's Christmas dinner, the burden of preparation would not fall so suddenly or with such crushing force upon those who minister to us, and many who are now unable to rejoice in the Christmas celebration would be found joyfully singing the Christmas song. Much of the congestion and the crowding of the present would be rendered impossible, and Christmas would become what it ought to be,—a time of universal exultation, a season of worldwide gratitude and love.

But when one gets thus far he dis-

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covers that he must go farther. Why confine Christmas, some one says, to the month of December? No one can be certain that Jesus was born in December. The New Testament does not say so, nor does the New Testament contain any evidence by which any particular month of the year can be proved to be the month of Jesus' birth. Plausible arguments have been adduced to prove that his birthday came in September. October also has put in its claim. There are only a few of the twelve months which have not stood up and demanded recognition and honor as the month of the year in which the King of Glory came. Months hitherto silent will no doubt speak later on.

It is evidently not God's will that we should know in what season of the year Jesus came. Not one of his apostles

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felt inspired to give information upon that interesting but unimportant point. God has hidden the key to that secret, and nobody knows where to find it. This is the Lord's doing, and it ought to have a meaning for our eyes. If we do not know the month of Jesus' birth and if God has so fixed things that such knowledge is forever beyond our reach, why not build the Christmas palace upon the month of January as well as upon the month of December? A two months' Christmas would be better than a one month Christmas, and as it is impossible to draw the line at the end of January and say thus far shall Christmas extend and no farther, why not take in February, March and April; yes, May, June and July, also August, September, October and November? Are we justi-

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fied in leaving out any of the months of the year? Do we not call it the year of our Lord? Why not then let him have the whole of it as a suitable memorial of his birth? A Christmas a year long—that would not be too protracted. Christmas all the time—that would be ideal. Always extending merry greetings, always wishing others well, always generous in our giving, always humming the angels' song, always seeking and praising the King—is not that the sort of Christmas which this world of ours most needs?

Certainly it is the kind of Christmas most pleasing to the heart of Christ. I imagined I heard him saying, as he beheld the Christmas which our civilization had produced: "I hate your Christmas, I am weary of it, because

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so many of my children are fatigued. It is an abomination unto me because it has rolled a crushing weight on so many hearts. Away with it. It is too small. Build me a more spacious Christmas. Extend the walls of it, until like the New Jerusalem it shall lie four-square, with three gates on each side, so capacious and hospitable that the populations of the earth can bring their glory into it. Let the Christmas season be coterminous with the limits of the year."

Now when I heard him say this I asked myself the question, Who is sufficient for this thing? Who can build this stately Christmas ample enough to fill a year? To make one day bright and glorious—even this is sometimes hard. We brush away our tears, we crush down in our hearts the dark

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and fearsome feelings, saying, "This is Christmas Day. I must to-day be cheery, to-day I must wear a smiling face; but to-morrow I will pick up again my burden, to-morrow I will cry again. For the sake of the children I will pretend that I am happy—only for a day." It is by no means easy to make an ideal Christmas even one day long. Many a time the Christmas crystal palace has been shattered to fragments by stones hurled by the hands of the heart's foes. To build a palace covering the extensive area of a year, planting a column on each one of the three hundred and sixty-five pieces of that strange mosaic which men call Time, swinging over all a dome full of the light and glory of God's face—this is an enterprise as difficult as it is stupendous, but one from which no true



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follower of Jesus ought to shrink.

When I saw that the old Christmas had been really outgrown and realized that a new Christmas must be speedily constructed, I set out at once in search of architects and builders competent for so vast an undertaking. Who, I said, can build a Christmas great enough to satisfy and bless a world? Who can take the walls of our little Christmas and by some magic power extend them until they reach around the borders of a year? So I pondered and I was greatly troubled, because I knew not where to go. Where, I asked, shall wisdom be found?

First of all I went to the learned men, the men who know what the past has been and what the present is. I knocked at the doors of all the universities, beginning with the oldest and



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ending with the youngest, but in no one of them could I find builders for this new and gigantic work. I then turned to the market-place where men of practical genius are wont to congregate. I mingled with the captains of industry; I glanced down the lines of merchants, bankers, manufacturers, the men who are doing the largest things in our day and generation, and I said in a loud voice, "Can any of you gentlemen build the world a larger Christmas?" and not one voice replied, "I can."

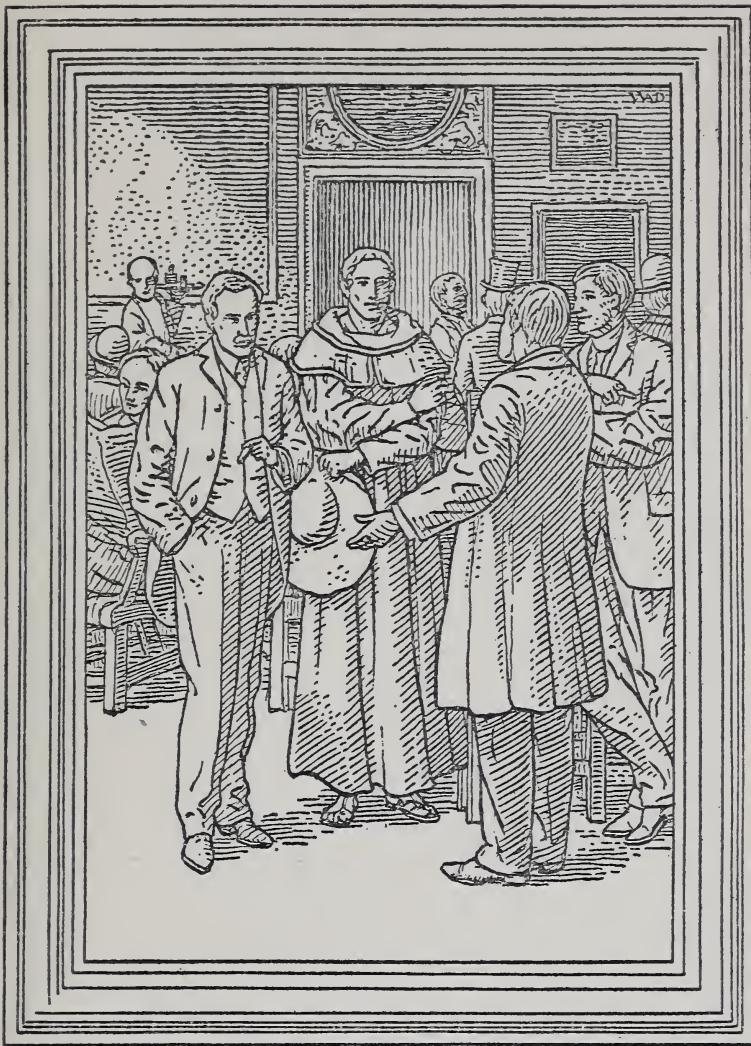
Thereupon I went to the palaces of kings, where live the great and mighty of the earth, and when I noticed the glitter of the crowns and the gorgeousness of the sceptres I felt encouraged, for I said: "Here is a royal thing to be attempted, and surely royal

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heads and hearts shall prove equal to the task.” But, alas, at the door of every royal palace the same word was given: “No one here has skill or power sufficient to build a larger Christmas.”

Not yet hopeless I turned to the parliaments of the world and looked into the august faces of lords and senators, of generals and princes,—men who have carved their names in the body of the life of their time, and I said pleadingly: “Can you, or any men you know, come and erect for the world a larger Christmas?” and my question brought nothing but silence for an answer.

I then stole into the study of the philosophers and glided into the groves where walk the poets; I passed from court to court where learned judges sit; I entered boldly into the camp



And my question brought nothing
but silence for an answer

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where army and navy leaders study plans for the conquest of the world, and everywhere I asked the same baffling question: "Can you erect for mankind a more spacious and more fitting Christmas?" and in every place the same answer was returned: "Strength and wisdom equal to so great a task do not dwell with us."

And then I turned to the aged. Wherever there was a gray head I paused and put once more my question. Wherever I could find a man of experience, of achievement, of earthly wisdom, of renowned skill, of acknowledged genius, there I propounded my interrogation, ever receiving the same disappointing reply. And when I had travelled round the world and could find nowhere any man or woman, high or low, rich or poor, great or humble,

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mighty or feeble, who could give me what I sought, all at once I remembered that Christmas is the one celebration of all the jubilees known in human history which cannot be carried on without the presence of children. I began to reflect upon the fact that Christmas is the one holiday which cannot be separated from the brightness of a child's eyes or the music of a child's laughter.

I fell to pondering the fact that when old folks think of Christmas they think of the days when they were young. When their children are grown and have gone far away from home, the parents refresh their hearts by thinking of the time when there was a Christmas tree in the nursery and the glad shout of children exulting over their treasures filled all the house. And

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I remembered also that husbands and wives who have no children find their hearts going out toward other people's children at Christmas time: And when I saw in my mind's eye the whole world gathered together for the celebration of Christmas and beheld a little child in the centre, I began to think of the day when in Capernaum Jesus set a child in the midst of twelve men, saying: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." And when this all flashed upon me I started out at once in search of a child. "To him undoubtedly," I said, "has God committed the secret of Christmas. He can tell me where the Christmas builders can be found."

I went, I asked, and great was my reward. Through a child's eyes I looked into the child heart, and there standing radiant and beautiful were

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seven angels,—the angels which are the builders of Christmas. These are their names: Wonder, Humility, Trust, Simplicity, Purity, Joy, and Affection. By these the first Christmas was constructed, and without these no genuine Christmas can be built. These are strong angels, they dig deep and they mount high. They can build a Christmas covering the year.

Christmas is glorious because it is the creation of a child. Man is not the architect of it. It is not a creation of human ingenuity or wisdom. It was built in the first place by a baby, and the glitter of it was simply the reflection of the light of a baby's eyes. The kings of the earth have often taken council together, but they have never conceived anything so beautiful as Christmas. For a marvel so stupen-

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dous God fell back upon a child. Children are the magicians of the earth. Their wizardry surpasses that of magic. The scope and power of their necromancy, who can measure?

There was nothing in the world like Christmas till Jesus came. On the day of his birth God called the nations together and set a little child in their midst. From the beginning a full-grown man had stood at the centre, but the circle gathered round him had never been joyous. Sometimes the central man had been a general and sometimes a king, occasionally he had been a scholar and frequently a saint; but no matter who he was the circle was not enchanted and the heart refused to sing. But as soon as a child was placed at the centre, humanity began to organize itself in unprecedented ways

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and to move forward along original lines. It began to sing a new song. The world had for ages been despondent and hopeless, and no potentate or miracle-worker, however mighty, had been able to lift it out of its dark mood. But when God took a child and set him in the midst, then was the world's mouth filled with laughter, and all things became new.

This is the difference then between the ancient world and the modern, the first had an adult at the centre, the latter has a child. Out of the child heart —and the child heart is the Christ heart—are coming the forces for the rebuilding of the world. The problem of existence is the task of keeping the child in us alive, the heart that wonders, trusts and loves.

Christmas is not a day, it is a mood.

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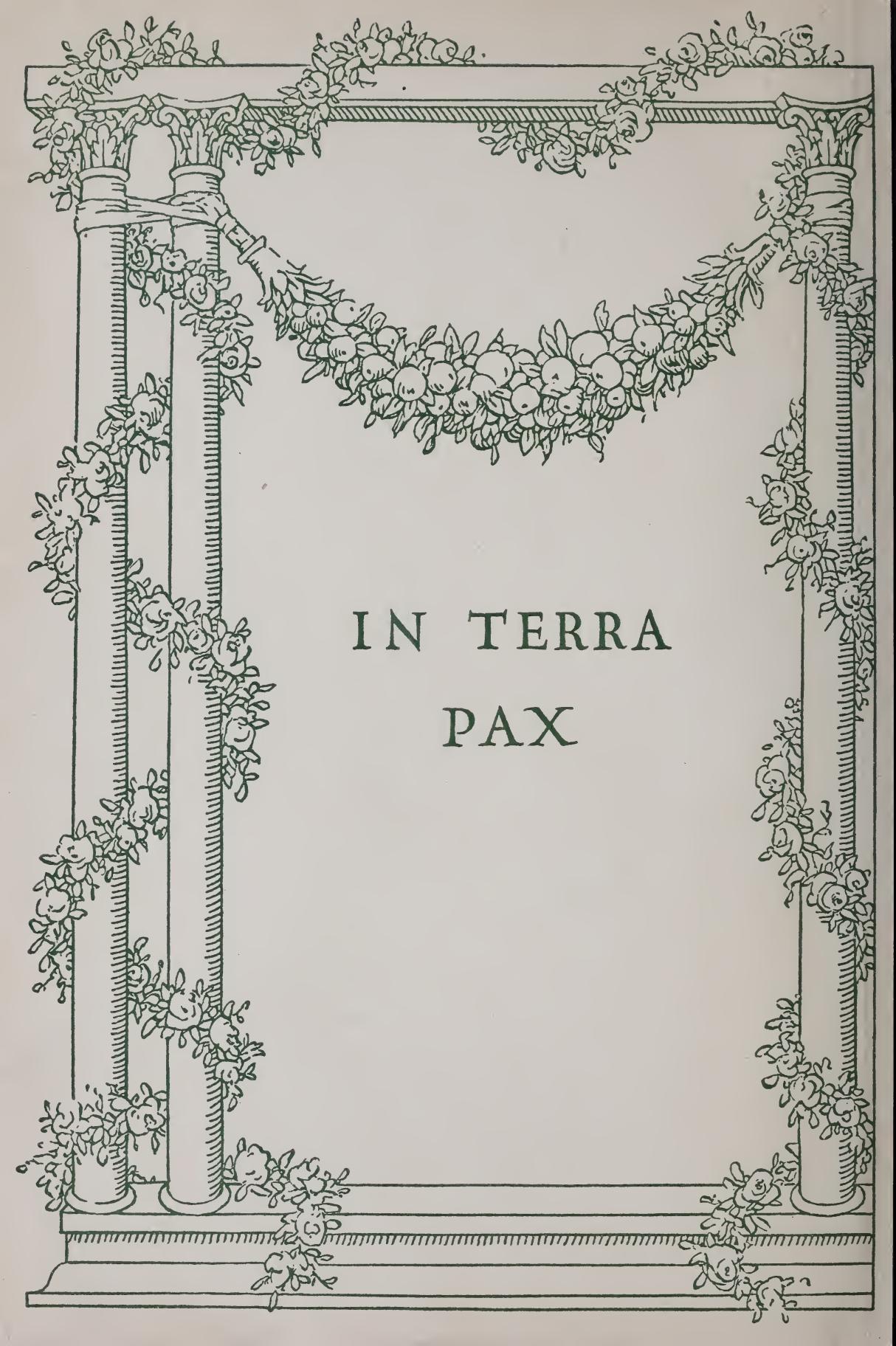
It is independent of days. We celebrate it on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, any day of the week. Christmas is indifferent to days. It has nothing to do with the almanac. It has nothing to do with place. It is as independent of geography as it is of chronology. It has no relation to human government or even to race or blood. It is an institution which can be set up on any soil and under the folds of any flag. Christmas is a spiritual creation and belongs to the kingdom of the heart. It is constructed by the angels of the heart of a child. If it then be a mood, it can be extended over a week, a month, a year, a lifetime. It can be built upon time, upon eternity. If you confine it to a day, you miss the meaning of it. If you try to cram it into twenty-four hours, you crush it and lose the es-

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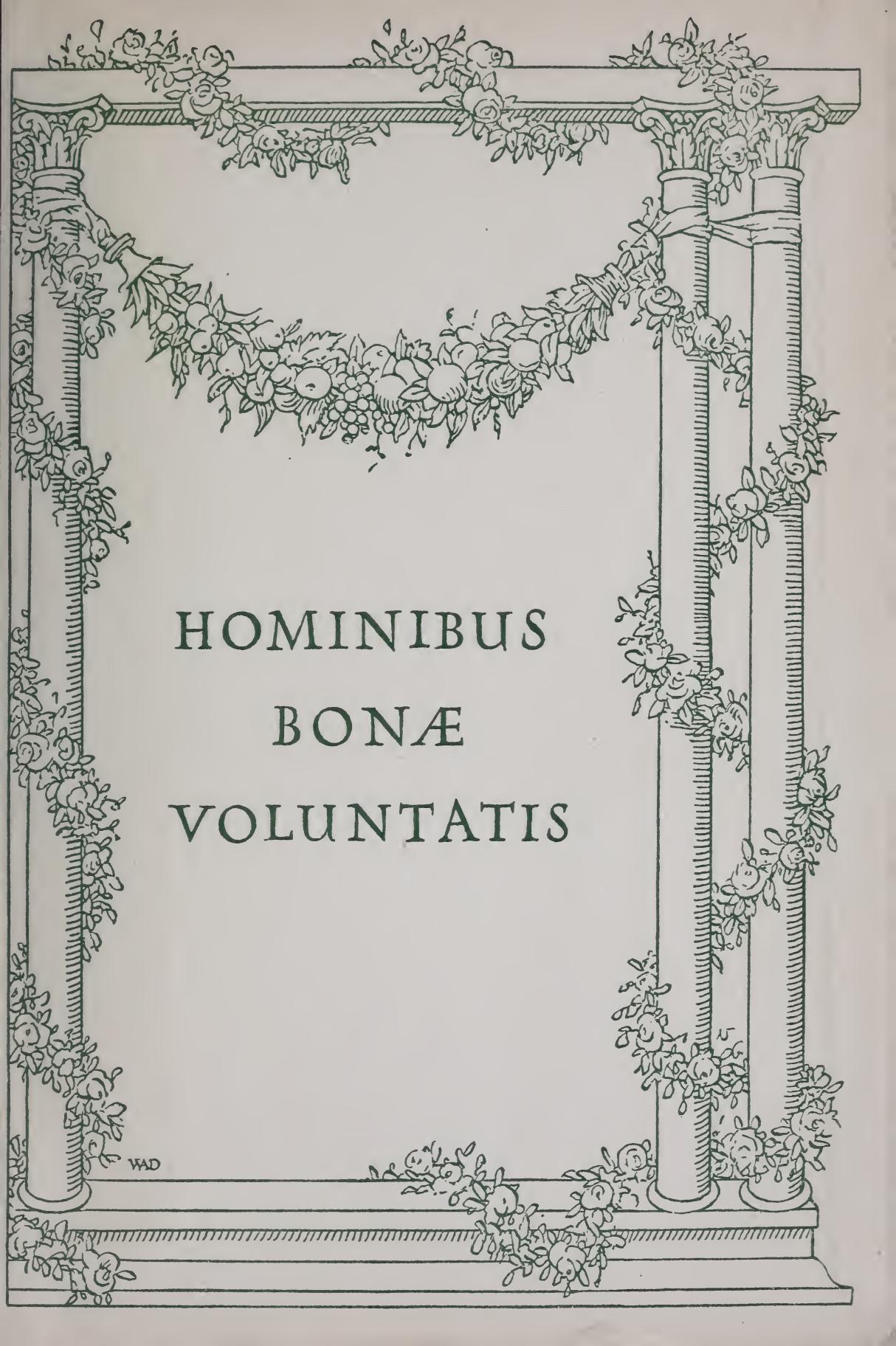
sence of it. The Christmas spirit is the only spirit by which men and women really live. The Saviour of the world has said: You cannot enter the kingdom of heaven—and that is his name for Christmas—except you become

“As a Little Child.”

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